Real Food Challenge Report

Indiana University Bloomington

Residential Programs & Services
Fiscal Year 2012-2013
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Preamble:

Agricultural systems have expanded globally, to the point that they are now disrupting the planet’s nutrient cycles and carbon balance. Deforestation removes valuable carbon sinks that could mitigate climate change and has devastating effects on both biodiversity and indigenous peoples. A major driver of deforestation is the expansion of oil palm plantations to meet industrial demand for high-melting-point, shelf-stable oils for addition to processed foods. Consolidation of agricultural methods into industrial-scale operations has led to vast monocultures of crops, especially corn and soy, that demand high inputs of water, synthetic fertilizers, and petrochemicals, leading to depletion of deep aquifers and the pollution of surface water, soil, and air. Agricultural monocultures are genetically depauperate, and consequently vulnerable to extreme weather events, insect and nematode infestation, and microbial disease. Concentrated animal feeding operations (or CAFOs) rely on non-therapeutic antibiotic use (which drives selection for antibiotic-resistant pathogens, some of which already cause incurable disease) and are a major global source of greenhouse gasses. The current global food system is ultimately unsustainable, and requires major changes to address biological, physical, and social limitations.

I. Purpose

The Campus Sustainability Advisory Board’s Food Working Group (FWG) was formed in 2007 and “strives to support an environmentally and financially sustainable food system focusing on quality, taste, and nutrition, as well as the social, ecological, and public health costs of food production and consumption” (FWG mission statement). One of the FWG’s goals is to shift procurement within the university to more sustainable sources.

Indiana University Bloomington has three food providers: Residential Programs and Services (RPS) Dining, Athletics Dining, and Sodexo. All three dining services have implemented various sustainability initiatives, but as of 2013, there
was no clear consensus on the definition of sustainable food or the impact of different strategies. The FWG, which facilitates collaboration among stakeholders, held the 1st IU Food Summit on November 8, 2013 to discuss definitions of ‘local’ and ‘sustainable’ food and strategies for increasing access to these foods on the IU Bloomington campus. By the end of the summit, the FWG realized the urgent need to find a baseline, evaluate sustainable food options, and collectively establish procurement goals.

The FWG found the Real Food Challenge (RFC) definition of sustainable food to be widely accepted, including by the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE). The RFC definition, described further in the next section, covers more areas of sustainability than distance traveled by food products. The only previous assessment of sustainability included the “local” factor, but a sustainable food system is much more than a scalar issue. The FWG decided to pursue the RFC Calculator process, which provided us with a better understanding of where foods are coming from and ways to shift purchases with the most impact and least cost. Additionally, this format made our results comparable to other schools that have previously or are currently using the same guidelines.

II. Methods
A. Real Food Challenge

The Real Food Challenge (RFC) is a non-profit organization that began in 2007 and supports a national network of student food activists. The RFC campaign consists of two major initiatives: the Real Food Campus Commitment and the Real Food Calculator. The Real Food Campus Commitment has been signed by 25 colleges across the country as well as the 24-campus California State University (CSU) system. The commitment includes a procurement goal of 20% “real” food by 2020, as well as additional operational and educational initiatives such as the development of a food systems working group. The RFC defines “real” food as that which satisfies the criteria in at least one of the categories listed below. A more detailed description of the criteria can be found in the appendix and at realfoodchallenge.org.

- **Local and Community-Based:** These foods can be traced to farms and businesses that are locally owned and operated (within 150/250 miles of the purchasing institution) and gross less than 1% of the industry leader. Sourcing these foods supports the local economy by keeping money in the community and builds community relations. The food travels fewer miles to reach consumers. The food is seasonal, and when it is fresh, it often has a higher nutritional content.
• **Fair:** Individuals involved in food production, distribution, preparation--and other parts of the food system—work in safe and fair conditions; receive a living wage; are ensured the right to organize and the right to a grievance process; and have equal opportunity for employment. Fair food builds community capacity and ensures and promotes socially just practices in the food system.

• **Ecologically Sound:** Farms, businesses, and other operations involved with food production practice environmental stewardship that conserves biodiversity and preserves natural resources, including energy, wildlife, water, air, and soil. Production practices should not use toxic substances and should minimize both direct and indirect petroleum inputs.

• **Humane:** Animals can express natural behavior in a low-stress environment and are raised without hormones, antibiotics or other unnecessary medication. Slaughter and meat-preparation is carried out in facilities that carefully and routinely test for bacterial pathogens, take appropriate remediation action if needed, and that make their testing results public.

The Real Food Calculator is an online tool used to store data on food products and calculate the percentage of food purchases that meet the RFC criteria as detailed in the Real Food Guide. Items are each reviewed with respect to the four categories, where applicable. Each item is also subject to disqualification based on a list of ingredients that are not considered sustainable (or real) in any manner. The RFC criteria are recognized by the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) and satisfy the sustainable food requirements of AASHE’s Sustainability Tracking And Assessment System (STARS).

**B. IU Bloomington Students, Staff and Faculty**

Two IUB students, Rae Waddel and Kelsey Gumm, started the RFC Calculator process independently during the spring semester of 2013. That summer, four student interns of the Office of Sustainability attained the official support of the Food Working Group and the dining directors at IUB and restarted the Real Food Calculator initiative. The three dining operations (RPS, Sodexo, Athletics) completed a baseline survey and helped the students acquire invoices for the assessment. The students also started reaching out to vendors for purchasing reports and other information. Two of the interns continued work on the RFC assessment into the fall semester of 2013, before the project became an official IU course.

During the spring of 2014, a member of the FWG and Chair of the Geography Department, Daniel C. Knudsen, started an undergraduate course to continue the assessment with hopes of completing it. [GEOG-G450: Undergraduate Readings and Research in Geography, Topic: Real Food Challenge]. Three students and Professor
Knudsen finished a preliminary assessment of all food products purchased by IU Bloomington’s largest dining operation, Residential Programs and Services (RPS). This course will be offered again during the fall semester of 2014; Knudsen plans to finish the assessment for the other two dining services: Sodexo and IU Athletics.

In the RFC course, students researched each vendor primarily through websites, phone calls and e-mails. They evaluated the validity of sustainability claims made by all relative food corporations, researched agricultural and labor practices, and often examined specific ingredients. The students used the Real Food Guide to determine which products meet the criteria in at least one of the four categories: Local & Community-based, Fair, Ecologically Sound, and Humane. As they found food products to be real or not, they documented and compiled this information in an Excel workbook. They found the percentage of food purchased by RPS that is considered real (sustainable) and identified sources of real food. This information can be used by the University to evaluate opportunities for the procurement of more sustainable food.

With the large amount of food items purchased by Indiana University, the Real Food Challenge class found it easier to work within an Excel spreadsheet, as opposed to using the Real Food Calculator database. The Real Food Challenge is currently working to increase the capacity and functionality of their database, as it is a relatively new web tool. The Excel spreadsheet is based off of the RFC Guide and is assumed to use the same base calculations as the RFC Calculator. It is not clear whether future RFC courses at IU will transition to using the web tool, as it may prove useful to upload the IUB information to the RFC Calculator to publicize the initiative and directly compare results to that of other schools.

The students used velocity reports from vendors in conjunction with usage reports from RPS’s food management software, CBORD. These reports were compared to ensure that all food products were accounted for. The velocity/usage reports show total purchases of each item and can be run for any specified time period. These reports also contain information about manufacturers, distribution facilities, product descriptions and stock-keeping unit (SKU) numbers. With the transition from invoices to velocity reports, the RFC class was able to assess an entire year of purchases, as opposed to a small sample. They completed the RFC assessment for RPS for the 2012-2013 fiscal year. The fall-semester RFC course will complete the assessment for the 2012-2013 fiscal year for Sodexo and IU Athletics Dining.

1 The RFC Guide classifies certifications and other criteria as most rigorous (Green), adequate (Yellow) and insufficient (Red). These classifications are then used to identify Real Food A and Real Food B. The assessment at IUB did not incorporate this level of detail, and everything considered Green or Yellow was counted as real.
The final output of the Real Food Challenge course includes:

1. An Excel spreadsheet with 16,871 items marked as real/not with relevant information
2. A manufacturers sheet with detailed information on sources used by vendors and general notes taken during the research

### III. Summary of Results:

The students calculated 3.84% of RPS food purchases to be real (sustainable). This percentage of real food is calculated as money spent on real food out of total food expenditures. The 3.84% breaks down as follows:

Preliminary Results (RPS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Expenditure</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Expenditure</td>
<td>$12,183,718</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local</td>
<td>$252,457</td>
<td>2.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>$20,973</td>
<td>0.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecological</td>
<td>$188,723</td>
<td>1.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humane</td>
<td>$6,057</td>
<td>0.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total “Real Food”</td>
<td>$468,210</td>
<td>3.84%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*There is some reason to believe that this percentage is an underestimate, and that more real food will be found once vendors and distributors provide more detailed information on their products.*
The vendors/distributors from whom IU purchased local and community-based products (brands in parentheses):

- Alpha Baking Co.
- GFS (Aunt Millie’s Bakehouse, Clyde’s Delicious Donuts, Hodgson Mill, Indiana Sugars Inc., Weaver Brothers Inc., Weisenberger Mills, Wick’s Pies Inc.)
- Piazza Produce
- Scholar’s Inn Bakehouse
- Southern Food Systems (Charlie Bigg’s)
- Troyer Foods

The vendors/distributors from whom IU purchased fair products:

- Tree of Life (Green & Blacks, Larabar, Nature’s Path)
- McConnell & Sons (Pickwick/Sara Lee)

The vendors/distributors from whom IU purchased ecologically-sound products:

- GFS (Barkman Honey LLC, Barrel O’ Fun Snack Foods, Unilever Food Solutions)
- McConnell & Sons (Pickwick/Sara Lee)

The distributor from whom IU purchased humane products:

- GFS (Foster Farms)
IV. Recommendations

Recommendations from the RFC class

Short-term
1. Local, fair, ecological, and humane products should have separate SKU numbers from products that do not meet these standards

2. Web pages that clearly "declare" which goods are local, fair, ecological, and/or humane

3. Web pages and velocity reports that clearly state how companies define local, fair, ecological and/or humane

Long-term
1. If you are a producer, consider whether certification as fair, ecological and/or humane is a good competitive move for your company

2. If you are a distributor, consider if better documenting local, fair, ecological and/or humane among producers you distribute is a good competitive move for your company

Additional Recommendations

1. Continue to offer the RFC class every semester
   The course should be offered every semester. The students should complete the audit of Sodexo and Athletics in the Fall and continue the audit of RPS during the Spring. Once the data acquisition and research are more streamlined, students enrolled in the course can work more on making procurement recommendations and integrating the research with IU food management systems.

2. Research other certifications
   Some IU food vendors have certifications not listed on the Real Food Guide. It is recommended that the Food Working Group (FWG) research these other certifications and decide if they are valid. Examples include the Conservation International certification used by Starbucks’ coffee and rBST-free certifications used by Prairie Farms. The FWG should review the criteria used by the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) and consider any additional certifications. The RFC Calculator Working Group is currently researching regional certifications and creating a Regional Addendum to the Real Food Guide. It is recommended the FWG consider using this Addendum for future calculations and to revise the RPS assessment.
3. **Advertise and expand the RFC class**

The RFC class was a last minute project, and not much publicity was generated about the course. The course should be promoted early on to increase student enrollment. There were many limitations to having only three students enrolled; students spent entirety of class doing research. With an increased enrollment, the course could be expanded to include readings, trips to production facilities, and a more comprehensive data evaluation.

4. **Streamline data acquisition**

It is recommended that a standard form be used in future data requests to vendors and distributors. IUOS interns and RFC students should continue making connections with vendors and identify the in-house reporting mechanism for Athletics like those used for RPS (CBORD) and Sodexo (Market Connection). Combining vendor reports and reports from internal food management systems should help verify that all food purchases are included in future calculations. Building relationships with vendors will also improve future sustainable food initiatives.

**Appendix – RFC Criteria**

**Local and Community-Based:** Products are produced, processed, and distributed from within 150/250 miles of the institution.

Producer must be a privately-traded or cooperatively owned business that grosses less than 1% of the industry leader.

Producer must be a privately-traded or cooperatively-owned business that grosses less than 1% of the industry leader. Independently owned businesses must have full autonomy and decision-making power about business processing and distribution practices. All production, processing and distribution facilities must be
within 150 or 250 miles of the institution.  
Must be a true co-op rather than contractors to a larger corporation.

**Fair:** Individuals involved in food production, distribution, preparation—and other parts of the food system—work in safe and fair conditions; receive a living wage; are ensured the right to organize and the right to a grievance process; and have equal opportunity for employment.

List of Certifications that count as Real:

- Fair Trade Certified by Ecocert
- Fair Trade Certified by Fair Trade USA
- Fair Trade Certified by Fair Labeling Organization
- Fair for Life Certified by IMO
- Food Justice Certified by Agricultural Justice Project
- Ecocert Fair Trade Certified
- Fair Foods Standards Council Fair Food Program

For single source products without certification, product can count as fair if the producer can confirm in writing for all employees that they receive

- Safe and fair working conditions
- Living wage
- Right to benefits
- Day of rest and overtime
- Equal pay for equivalent work
- Right to organize
- right to return to seasonal position and
- right to freedom of association

**Ecologically Sound:** Farms, businesses, and other operations involved with food production practice environmental stewardship that conserves biodiversity and preserves natural resources, including energy, wildlife, water, air, and soil. Production practices should not use toxic substances and should minimize both direct and indirect petroleum inputs.

List of Certifications that count as real in this category:

- Protected Harvest Certified
- Marine Stewardship Council Certified
- Food Alliance Certified
- Rainforest Alliance Certified
- Salmon Safe
- Fair Trade Certified
- Biodynamic Certified by Demeter
- USDA Certified Organic
- Monterey Bay Aquarium Regional Seafood Watch Guide “Best Choice” or “Good Alternative”
- Bird Friendly by Smithsonian
- Transitional Organic by OIA

**Humane**

Animals: Animals can express natural behavior in a low-stress environment are raised with no hormones or unnecessary medication.

List of certifications:

- Food Alliance Certified
- Animal Welfare Approved
- Pasture-Raised
- USDA Cage-Free (eggs)
- Humanely Raised
- USDA Certified Organic
- Certified Humane by Humane Farm Animal Care
- Biodynamic Certified by Demeter
- Global Animal Partnership Steps 3-5
- AGA Grassfed
- “Cage Free Eggs” by USDA-AMS
- American Humane Certified – no enriched cages

**Disqualifiers**

- Contains high fructose corn syrup
- Contains rGBH/rBST
- Guilty of criminal slave labor or indentured servitude
- OSHA, FLSA, NLRB violation within past 3 years
- Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO)
- Contains genetically modified organisms (GMOs)
- Sodium nitrate or sodium nitrite added
- Contains acesulfame-potassium
- Contains butylated hydroxyanisol (BHA)
- Contains caramel coloring
- Contains olestra (Olean)
- Contains partially hydrogenated oil (trans fats)
- Contains potassium bromate
- Contains propyl gallate
- Contains saccharin
- Contains blue #2, green #3, red #3, yellow #5, and/or yellow #6

Green Yellow or Red

- Green – counts as real food. Criteria that meet the highest standards
- Yellow – counts as real food. Standards are not as strict
- Red – criteria that do not meet the standards for real food

Real Food A or Real Food B

- Real Food A is a food item that is green or yellow light in more than one category
- Real Food B is a food item that is only green or yellow light in one category

Disqualifiers: Products containing disqualifying characteristics cannot count as real food in any category